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ABSTRACT

To determine the significance of selected social issues in the social studies and non-social studies curriculum, a questionnaire was completed by principals, social studies teachers, and teachers from other subject areas at the middle school level. Respondents of both sexes, identifying themselves as conservative or liberal, were asked to rank 18 social issues in order of importance and to indicate whether each is or ought to be included in the curriculum. Based on useable responses from 64 of the 75 schools surveyed, alcohol and drug abuse, environmental pollution, and violence were consistently rated as the top three social issues. Females and liberals tended to feel more strongly that social issues are and ought to be included in the curriculum. Female respondents tended to agree with male respondents much more than conservative respondents agreed with the liberals when ranking the importance of social issues. Although 90 percent of the respondents felt that the above issues were the most significant, barely half believed that they are currently included in the social studies or other subjects. Although there was little agreement about the extent to which each issue should be included in the curriculum, environmental pollution ranked highest among issues that should be included both in social studies and in subjects other than social studies. (LH)

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Significance, Prevalence and Desirability of Social Issues in School Curriculum: Implications for Teacher Education

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Abstract

of

Manuscript

Significance, Prevalence and Desirability
of Social Issues in School Curriculum:
Implications for Teacher Education

As beginning and veteran teachers are trained and re-trained to design and redesign curricular offerings for their own classrooms they must be cognizant of social issues and their impact on the lives and futures of students.

To assist in this relevant endeavor, this manuscript reveals how Principals, Social Studies Teachers and Non-Social Studies Teachers rank significant social issues and indicates which of those <u>are</u> and <u>should be</u> included in social studies and other subjects.

Significance, Prevalence and Desirability of Social Issues in School Curriculum: Implication for Teacher Educators

by

Dr. Joseph D. Huber

Teacher educators are constantly attempting to show and tell their pre and in-service students how to make curriculum and instruction more relevant for their students.

To promote relevance in curriculum both beginning and veteran teachers need to know 1) What are the most significant social issues? 2) Are significant social issues included in school curriculum? 3) Should significant social issues be included in the school curriculum? These three questions formed the basis for a research project which went beyond the debate state of talking about social issues in the curriculum to indicating the degree of significance selected social issues have for mankind and to what extent these issues <u>are</u> and <u>should be</u> included in the social studies and non-social studies school curriculum.

<u>Recent research</u> reminds us that what people learn in school is of great consequence to them and to the world in which they live and will live. Social issues do influence and affect curriculum and curriculum does influence and affect social conditions.

At enormous expense, governments of at least two countries maintain the capacity to destroy our species in a nuclear holocaust. Rainwater, fouled by the industrial wastes of one country, destroys wildlife in another while nuclear leaks threaten all life. Each day untold numbers of people die of

hunger while food surpluses pile up in enormous warehouses in North American and Western Europe (Molnar, 1982).

In the mid-1960's atmosphere of widespread public dissatisfaction with schools, educators engaged in extensive curricular experimentation. Two general and competing schools of thought emerged. One school of thought held that school performance could not be improved appreciably unless curricular reform was linked to social change. Adherents argued that unless curricular reform was accompanied by social change the schools could only perpetuate social inequality (Rist, 1970; Baratz and Baratz, 1970). The other school of thought held that many children did not succeed academically because they were culturally deficient. Curriculum was seen, therefore, as a compensating mechanism for social factors that placed students at a disadvantage academically (Mack, 1978).

The relationship between school and society now appears much more complicated than the schools-shape-society/schools-reflect-society dichotomy. Evidence seems to suggest that curricular content and process, singly and in relation, both shape and are shaped by sociocultural factors.

Finally, it is probably accurate to say that concern about using social issues that may be controversial as curricular content is actually a concern that "community" values are being transgressed. "Community" values mean for the most part (though not always) the values of the local and/or national power structure. It is, for example, unquestionably easier for most teachers to use environmental education materials from McDonalds or consumer education materials from J. C. Penney than economic education materials from the Union of Racial Political Economists. The near certainty that explicitly using social issues as curricular content will cause conflict illuminates a general agreement that the content used as a matrix to teach anything does itself teach (Molnar, 1982).

The population of this research was the educators in the 75 middle schools of South Dakota. Middle Schools were defined as those school units organized into grade levels of 5-8, 6-8, 6-9, 7-8 or 7-9 according to the 1983-84 South Dakota Education Directory.

The sample group included the principal, one social studies teacher and one non-social studies teacher in each of the 75 middle schools in South Dakota.

Procedures:

The data for the research were gathered via a questionnaire which was completed by the respondents. The first section of the questionnaire contained 18 social issues in alphabetical order. Each respondent was asked to rate each of the social issues as very important (1) down through very unimportant (5) in terms of its significance for mankind; then to indicate to what extent (great extent (1) down through very little (5)) each social issue is included in social studies and in other subjects; and, finally, to indicate to what extent (using the same rating scale) each social issue should be included in social studies and in other subjects.

Six other questions plus a demographic section were included in each questionnaire.

The 18 social issues arranged in alphabetical order were:

1. Abortion and sex education
2. Alcohol and drug abuse
3. Alternative forms of government
4. Back to basics
5. Censorship of books
6. Corruption of officials
7. Division into two class society
8. Draft registration
9. Electronic games
10. Genetic engineering
11. Nuclear disarmament
12. Pollution of environment
13. Racism
14. Religious freedom
15. Sexism
16. Single parent families
17. Students' rights
18. Violence

Along with a cover letter of explanation, each of the 75 principals was asked to complete the survey instrument and to forward one instrument to one of his/her social studies' teachers and another instrument to one of his/her non-social studies teachers (one who did not teach social studies but one who taught English, mathematics, science, physical education, etc.)

Usuable responses were received from 64 of the 75 schools for an 85% return. Over 90% of the principal respondents were male and 84% of the principals were conservative while almost 80% of the social studies teachers were male and 60% of the social studies teachers were conservative. Just a few more of the non-social studies teachers were female than male. Sixty-nine percent of the non-social studies teachers labeled themselves conservative.

Findings:

1. The Principals, Social Studies Teachers and Non-Social Studies Teachers exhibited high agreement (89%) that the top three significant social issues were, in order of importance: Alcohol and Drug Abuse, Pollution of Environment and Violence.

2. Very little agreement was evident when Principals, Social Studies Teachers and Non-Social Studies Teachers were asked to indicate the extent to which each significant social issue is included in social studies and other subjects. Principals and Social Studies Teachers agreed that Pollution of Environment was #1 among the social issues which are included in subjects other than social studies.

3. Very little agreement was reached when Principals, Social Studies Teachers and Non-Social Studies Teachers were asked to indicate the extent to which the 18 social issues should be included in social studies and other subjects. Principals and Social Studies Teachers agreed that Pollution of

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Environment was #1 among the social issues which should be included in subjects other than social studies.

4. Female and Male respondents agreed exactly that Alcohol and Drug Abuse, Pollution of Environment and Violence should be ranked 1st, 2nd, and 3rd when asked the relative importance of a series of 18 significant social issues.

5. Some agreement among Females and Males was noted when they were asked to indicate the extent to which each of 18 significant social issues is included in the social studies and other subjects. Their rankings were similar on 4 of the 18 issues in the social studies and 4 of the 18 in other subjects.

6. Female and Male respondents agreed 3 of 18 times concerning social studies and only 2 of 18 times in the other subjects area when asked to indicate the extent to which each significant social issues should be included in social studies and other subjects.

7. Conservatives and Liberals agreed on their ranks of significant social issues only 4 of the 18 times.

8. When asked to indicate the extent to which each of 18 significant social issues is included in the social studies, Conservatives and Liberals agreed exactly on only 3 of 18 choices and only twice in 18 times when asked to indicate the extent to which each of 18 significant social issues is included in other subjects.

9. Conservatives and Liberals agreed only 4 of 18 times concerning social studies and only 2 of 18 times concerning other subjects when asked to indicate the extent to which each of 18 significant social issues should be included in social studies or other subjects.

10. As a group about half of the respondents were satisfied with the school's choice of social issues to study and almost half didn't care.

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11. Only about half of the respondents indicated that there are social issues on which they wanted educators to take a position.

12. Females and Liberals tended to feel more strongly that social issues are and ought to be included in the social studies and other subjects than did Males and Conservatives.

13. A much higher percentage of Females and Liberals saw Sexism as an important social issue than did Males and Conservatives.

14. Female respondents tended to agree with Male respondents much more than Conservative respondents agreed with the Liberals when ranking the importance of social issues.

Conclusions

This research disclosed that the top 3 social issues in order were: Alcohol and Drug Abuse, Pollution of Environment and Violence. Over 90% of the respondents felt that Alcohol and Drug Abuse and Pollution of Environment are the most significant social issues for mankind; however, barely half of them believed that they are included in the social studies or other subjects.

Teacher educators could use these and other research findings on social issues and curriculum to become more aware of the significant social issues and their degree of inclusion in curriculum. Then, teacher educators should 1) help pre and in-service teachers know and understand social issues by showing them how to be current events sleuths and connoisseurs, and 2) encourage pre and in-service teachers to include social issues in each of their respective curricular areas by suggesting and showing them methods and media which will convey the issues and their implication to their K-12 students.

If the significant social issues identified by educators and society in general are not included in the school curriculum to the extent that teacher

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educators should make concerted efforts to exert their leadership and influence on and with curriculum development decision-making bodies to insure that these significant social issues are included in the curriculum for the benefit of our youth and country.

Table I

Rank and Percentage of Principals, Social Studies Teachers and Non-Social Studies Teachers Rating Social Issues As Very Important (1) or Important (2) For Mankind

Composite Rank	Issues	Role: Principal		Teacher: Social Studies		Non-Social Studies	
		Rank	%age	Rank	%age	Rank	%age
1.	Alcohol and Drug Abuse	2	89.1%	1	97.7%	1	93.2%
2.	Pollution of Environment	1	91.5	2	93.2	2	86.7
3.	Violence	3	77.3	3	90.7	4	80.0
4.	Nuclear Disarmament	4	76.6	6	86.4	6	72.7
5.	Abortion and Sex Education	12	57.5	6	86.4	3	84.1
6.	Corruption of Officials	6	66.0	4	88.6	8	66.7
7.	Racism	6	66.0	4	88.6	8	66.7
8.	Single Parent Families	5	74.5	10	70.5	7	71.1
9.	Back to the Basics	9	63.1	9	79.5	5	73.3
10.	Religious Freedom	13	51.1	6	86.4	8	66.7
11.	Alternative Forms of Government	11	59.1	11	61.9	11	59.5
12.	Genetic Engineering	6	66.0	14	47.7	15	46.7
13.	Two Class Society	10	59.6	12	55.8	16	43.2
14.	Draft Registration	14	50.0	16	45.5	13	48.9
15.	Sexism	17	29.8	13	54.5	12	57.8
16.	Students' Rights	15	41.3	15	47.6	13	48.9
17.	Censorship of Books	16	30.4	17	29.6	17	31.8
18.	Electronic Games	18	8.5	18	4.6	18	8.9

Table II

Rank and Percentage of Principals, Social Studies Teachers and Non-Social Studies Teachers Who Indicated That It Is Very Important (1) or Important (2) That Each Social Issue IS and SHOULD BE Included In Social Studies and Other Subjects

Composite Rank	Issues	Role	IS Included in: Social Studies Rank	IS Included in: Social Studies %age	IS Included in: Other Subjects Rank	IS Included in: Other Subjects %age	SHOULD BE Included in: Social Studies Rank	SHOULD BE Included in: Social Studies %age	SHOULD BE Included in: Other Subjects Rank	SHOULD BE Included in: Other Subjects %age
1.	Alcohol and Drug Abuse	Prin	12	23.8	2	53.5	12	43.9	2	75.6
		SST	13	17.5	3	45.0	12	51.3	3	80.5
		NSST	15	17.2	1	51.2	12	48.7	1	81.0
2.	Pollution of Environment	Prin	3	44.5	1	57.8	2	72.7	1	88.4
		SST	9	47.5	1	48.8	7	73.2	1	85.0
		NSST	7	27.5	3	44.2	1	73.2	3	67.4
3.	Violence	Prin	8	34.9	14	11.6	4	69.8	8	45.2
		SST	5	57.5	7	21.1	4	82.5	6	55.0
		NSST	6	30.8	10	12.5	5	62.5	10	34.9
4.	Nuclear Disarmament	Prin	5	41.9	10	16.7	1	74.4	10	39.0
		SST	3	59.5	11	13.5	2	90.3	8	48.7
		NSST	2	46.3	8	14.3	1	73.2	7	39.5
5.	Abortion and Sex Education	Prin	17	7.1	8	19.1	17	16.7	4	54.8
		SST	17	7.3	6	22.5	15	30.0	4	61.9
		NSST	17	2.7	4	19.1	15	33.3	4	61.0
6.	Corruption of Officials	Prin	6	40.9	9	17.1	5	68.9	9	41.9
		SST	1	77.3	15	7.9	1	93.0	12	36.6
		NSST	3	45.0	17	2.4	4	65.0	14	23.8
7.	Racism	Prin	2	48.9	4	26.8	8	60.0	5	52.5
		SST	2	71.4	5	23.1	3	85.0	5	61.5
		NSST	5	35.0	9	14.0	7	55.0	8	38.1
8.	Single Parent Families	Prin	14	17.4	5	25.0	6	68.2	7	48.8
		SST	14	15.0	12	12.5	13	47.5	7	52.4
		NSST	16	12.8	4	19.1	9	52.5	5	42.9
9.	Back to Basics	Prin	4	43.2	3	45.2	9	57.2	3	64.3
		SST	8	50.0	1	48.8	8	71.8	1	85.0
		NSST	9	24.3	2	46.3	6	61.9	2	74.4
10.	Religious Freedom	Prin	10	34.8	6	20.0	11	44.4	15	25.0
		SST	3	59.5	8	18.0	6	75.6	11	37.5
		NSST	7	27.5	13	7.0	8	53.7	11	32.6
11.	Alternative Forms of Government	Prin	1	50.0	15	10.8	2	72.7	17	13.2
		SST	7	52.4	17	0.0	9	70.7	16	15.8
		NSST	1	63.9	16	2.6	3	70.3	16	17.1
12.	Genetic Engineering	Prin	18	6.8	6	20.0	16	20.5	6	50.0
		SST	18	0.0	4	25.6	17	16.2	9	43.9
		NSST	18	2.5	4	19.1	17	22.5	6	40.5
13.	Two Class Society	Prin	8	34.9	11	16.3	7	60.5	11	33.3
		SST	6	54.8	13	10.5	5	76.2	13	35.9
		NSST	4	35.9	15	4.9	9	52.5	14	23.8
14.	Draft Registration	Prin	7	35.6	12	14.3	10	53.5	13	26.2
		SST	10	43.2	17	0.0	10	61.9	17	12.8
		NSST	12	20.0	18	2.3	11	48.8	17	14.0
15.	Sexism	Prin	13	21.7	16	9.3	14	33.3	16	16.3
		SST	11	35.0	10	15.0	11	56.4	10	39.0
		NSST	10	23.1	7	16.7	13	47.5	8	38.1
16.	Students' Rights	Prin	11	26.1	17	9.1	13	40.0	12	26.7
		SST	12	28.2	14	8.1	14	38.5	14	29.7
		NSST	12	20.0	11	9.8	14	37.5	12	30.2
17.	Censorship of Books	Prin	15	15.6	12	14.3	15	23.3	14	25.9
		SST	16	9.5	9	15.8	16	27.5	15	25.6
		NSST	11	20.5	11	9.8	16	30.0	13	26.2
18.	Electronic Games	Prin	16	13.6	18	4.7	18	2.4	18	7.1
		SST	15	12.2	16	2.6	18	7.7	17	12.5
		NSST	12	20.0	13	7.0	18	5.1	18	4.9

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